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Teacher Education Reform Making Significant Strides in Louisiana

BATON ROUGE - Commissioner of Higher Education Joe Savoie informed the Louisiana Board of Regents today that teacher education reform efforts in this state are working. The Commissioner pointed out that less than two years into its implementation, Louisiana's Teacher Quality Initiative is already yielding some very positive results. Savoie pointed out that in a recent presentation to the Louisiana Board of Regents, the state's Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Quality showed that the reform initiative is living up to its billing.

"We are clearly on track to ensure that every child in this state is educated by a qualified, caring, competent teacher. I am pleased with the steady progress being made through our Blue Ribbon Commission. Clearly, this holistic approach to reforming the way we train, recruit and retain teachers is a model for other states to follow," Savoie said.

Savoie said that the historical data presented last week at the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education meeting supports the reforms that have taken place. "I appreciate the efforts of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to continue focusing on the multifaceted impact of poverty on school performance in Louisiana. The data clearly shows that poor children in our state face significant achievement barriers that include enrollment in the poorest supported schools with the largest number of uncertified teachers. We concur that poverty is the greatest single threat to the educational prosperity of our children."

Major accomplishments in teacher education reform include complete redesign of teacher education programs at all public and private universities, strengthening of course content knowledge required of all teachers, implementation of an accountability system, ongoing professional development for teachers and streamlining of alternate certification programs to make it simpler and more attractive for qualified non-education graduates to move into teaching.

"Louisiana's Teacher Quality Initiative is an ongoing success story," said Commissioner of Higher Education E. Joseph Savoie. "We're not where we need to be yet, of course, but Louisiana's efforts to integrate secondary and postsecondary education into a seamless 'PK-16' system that guarantees

educational accountability and teacher quality is drawing national attention.”
(More)

Teacher Education Reform Making Significant Strides in Louisiana Add One

Louisiana has been recognized recently by the National Governor’s Association as a “Promising Practice State” regarding educational improvement. In addition, Harvard University selected Louisiana as one of 5 states to design a model literacy initiative to address President Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” legislation, and *Education Week* magazine lauded Louisiana for its efforts toward educational accountability.

The original Blue Ribbon Commission was formed by the Board of Regents and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to improve teacher quality in Louisiana. The Commission was composed of state, university, district, school, and community leaders. It was charged with recommending policies to the Governor, Board of Regents, and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education that would lead to a cohesive PK-16+ system to hold universities and school districts accountable for the aggressive recruitment, preparation, support, and retention of quality teachers who produce higher-achieving K-12 students. The commission met from September, 1999, to May, 2000. Implementation of the Commission’s recommendations began shortly thereafter and is ongoing.

The following table provides a summary of many of the specific changes that have taken place in Louisiana teacher education as a result of the Blue Ribbon Commission’s recommendations:

PRIOR TO REDESIGN (2000)	NOW (JANUARY 2003)
Higher education and elementary/ secondary education independently worked to improve teacher quality.	State nationally recognized for PK-16+ collaboration among state leaders, higher education and elementary/ secondary education to improve teacher quality and student learning.
Colleges of Education responsible for pre-service teacher learning.	Universities responsible for learning of pre-service teachers and PK-12 students .
Major in content area taught not required of undergraduate pre-service teachers.	Major in the content area taught required of all undergraduate pre-service teachers.
Varying hours of coursework required for alternate-certification teachers to become certified, dependent upon universities they attended.	Alternate certification teachers provided options for certification having consistent coursework hours, available concurrent with teaching full time.
Programs addressed broad developmental and academic needs of students in grades 1-8 and 7-12 .	Programs address more specific developmental and academic needs of students in grades PK-3, 1-6, 4-8 and 7-12 .
Varying hours of coursework needed for alternate certification of teachers .	21-36 hours of coursework in three alternate certification plans available to those with content knowledge and bachelor’s degrees outside education.

Existing university courses primarily determined the content of the teacher preparation programs.	State K-12 content standards, state teacher standards, national NCATE standards, and PRAXIS determine course and program content.
Colleges of Education faculty primarily designed teacher preparation programs.	Colleges of Arts/Humanities/Sciences, Colleges of Education, other colleges, and school/district personnel design teacher preparation programs.
Courses and individual faculty members decided what teachers to know prior to graduation.	Performance indicators and valid/reliable assessments will identify teacher knowledge prior to graduation when working with children in school settings.
Few Professional Development schools in Louisiana.	All universities have at least one Professional Development School.
Opportunities to teach children in school settings varied between universities.	Pre-service teachers will be working with children by their sophomore year and will spend more time teaching children in school before graduation.
Varying standards for quality across campuses.	National consultants to ensure quality of redesigned programs across campuses through external evaluations.
No formal accountability system for teacher preparation programs.	Teacher preparation accountability system rewarded high-performance programs and placed some programs within corrective action (2002).
No statewide system to link available certified teachers with available jobs.	Teachers may use an electronic system , which posts teaching positions by district, and allows application submission .
Colleges of Education responsible for teacher preparation up to graduation .	Universities provide follow-up support to graduates during initial years of teaching .
All new teachers received lifetime licensure .	New teachers undergo 150 hours of professional development (over 5 years) to renew licenses .
No PK-16+ Councils.	University vice chancellors chair PK-16+ Councils at all public and private universities .
Funding for teacher quality a low priority .	Significant funding increases directed at teacher quality have occurred.

